

CAMP TUHSMEHETA

No finer place, no finer people.....

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) hosted a meeting, January 19, 2004 with numerous stakeholders to further explore ways to effectively utilize Camp Tuhsmeheeta for the benefit of blind youth and adults. MDE continues to work toward this goal in partnership with the Michigan Commission for the Blind, Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind (OUB), blind consumer organizations, and parents of blind children organizations, the Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns, Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) and other stakeholders. Meeting participants agreed to work together to utilize the rich resources of the camp to give blind children the opportunity to acquire skills and gain confidence.

The Department of Education has entered into a lease agreement with OUB to run environmental and educational programs at the camp through 2006, with the promise of a 3 year lease with extensions in the near future.

Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind is primarily involved with running Camp Tuhsmeheeta at this time as well as sponsoring a Goal Ball tournament

Camp Tuhsmeheeta provides essential and necessary services to the blind and visually impaired youth of Michigan as well as hiring blind employees and therefore deserves all the moral and financial support the Department of Education can give it. The camp has the potential to make Michigan one of the best places in the country to be blind, by providing our blind youth with outdoor educational experiences and opportunities to help them become self confident, well rounded, competent adults.

"Camp Tuhsmeheeta, Camp Tuhsmeheeta, no finer place and no finer people, Spirits are high and friendships are deep at Camp Tuhsmeheeta" -chorus of song written by campers in the summer 2005 Music Camp session at Camp Tuhsmeheeta

As a service to its users, the Michigan Department of Education offers the use of Camp Tuhsmeheeta to Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind. This does not constitute endorsement or support of information or services offered by Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind or any other organization, group or individual providing services or programs at Camp Tuhsmeheeta.

Furthermore, neither the Michigan Department of Education nor any of their employees or contractors assumes any legal liability or responsibility for programs and services offered at Camp Tuhsmeheeta by any group, organization or individual.

If you'd like to volunteer, work at the camp, donate funds, or be on our email newsletter mailing list, please write strider@campt.org.

WWW.Campt.org Camp Tuhsmeheeta 10500 Lincoln Lake Rd. Greenville, MI 48838

Camp Tuhsmeheeta is a 297 acre camp located near Greenville, Michigan. The camp was purchased in 1971 with funds from the Michigan School for the Blind Gift Fund, and was run on proceeds from a trust fund established for facility maintenance and programming until 2003. There was only a log cabin with a dirt floor when the camp was purchased. It now has 2 modern dorm like cabins and a well appointed commercial kitchen and dining room, plus several other buildings for activities. The trust fund monies are no longer being allocated for programming, and Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind has run programs with donated monies for the last two years.

Programming for 2005 at Camp Tuhsmeheeta began with a technology weekend in February. We had a satellite internet connection and wireless network installed at Camp and got experts in Braille note takers, a form of adaptive technology, to come for Saturday and Sunday and teach computer skills and internet use to our blind and visually impaired campers. We brought in blind experts to teach blind kids who taught each other what they knew. We still had time for walks in snowy woods, and ice fishing and a talent show in the evening. It worked out well and everyone went home with new necessary skills. I

The work weekend at camp in May proved fruitful. We had a good turnout of campers, parents, and community volunteers. We got lots done. The campers and volunteers built 3 raised bed garden boxes for accessible gardening, as well as plowing up an area for a traditional in ground garden. We transplanted wild berries and trees and got the beds ready to sow. Jim Botting taught blind kids how to use the rototiller and let them do the plowing.

The other major project of the weekend was building an outdoor wood fired oven. We built a platform, filled it with a foot of sand, then 2 layers of fire brick and then a sand igloo like form. Next we mixed sand and clay to make the adobe for the oven by squishing them together like grapes. Shoes came off, and the fun began. Several hours later the first 5 inch layer was complete. We covered it with a tarp and everyone went home. Two weeks later the second layer was made and applied and 5 days before Memorial Day work weekend we fired it up. What a success. Small loaves of homemade bread baked in about 5 minutes. WE felt good about the projects accomplished and blind kids and adults participated in all aspects of the work. Our camp philosophy is teaching kids that they CAN do all kinds of things. They gain a sense of independence, adventure, and pride in their accomplishments at Camp T.

We held a GPS weekend workshop in late August, with Dr. Ponchillia and Scott Ford teaching this innovative new technology using Braille Notes. We learned to use a GPS system to navigate in town and at Camp T.

Harvest weekend co-coordinated by Gwen Botting, president of MPVI, and OUB at Camp T on October 7-9 was GREAT FUN. We went to Klackles Orchard in the morning, picked apples and pumpkins, then came back to camp and the kids all learned make apple pies, applesauce and prepare a turkey dinner with all the fixings. We had 67 campers and parents that evening. We carved pumpkins, made things in the woodshop, planted bulbs held a talent show, and enjoyed talking to each other. Weekends like this are good ways to meet new people and keep up with our old friends.

Camp Tuhsmeheeta Summer 2005

We had FUN. 109 campers gained essential skills this summer at Camp T. The crucial educational goals that are the primary focus of Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind (OUB) in the programming of Camp Tuhsmeheeta's summer camp sessions were very successful this year. The campers swam, hiked, canoed, did arts and crafts, sang and ate s'mores around the campfire, and lots of things they had never done before. They learned from each other as well as the staff and mentors and went home happy and more confident in themselves.

Science week offered young campers many new experiences. Nature walks, making root beer from plants growing at Camp T, making bat boxes, swimming, lots of exercise and Fun. The kids cooked over the campfire and baked pizzas in the new wood fired oven. We had bird song expert Stan Lilley come walk with us to identify the species of birds at Camp T. The campers worked in our brand new garden with raised beds (Many thanks to the Botting family and Lydia Schuck's Girl Scout troop for their help).

Family Camp session served 25 families with blind or visually impaired children or parents, grandparents and aunts and uncles. We had a total attendance of 97 people. We had planned actives like campfire cooking, canoeing, swimming, bat box making, arts & crafts, plus lots of free time in our beautiful camp and time for parents to network. Sighted siblings are an important part of family camp, and we offer special activities just for them there were tents full of camping families everywhere having FUN, FUN, and FUN! Al Swain came Saturday night to give a really inspirational talk. He is blind and in a wheelchair and is the director of the Center for Independent Living in Lansing. A joint meeting was held by Michigan's 2 most prominent parent's organizations, Michigan Parents of Visually Impaired Children and Parents of Blind Children

Adventure Boot Camp for teens was hard work and FUN. The campers slept in tents all week, cooked their meals on a campfire, did conditioning exercises, and lots of swimming and hiking. They learned to tip a canoe over and right it again (just in case).

Adventure Camp was for those who had prepared the week before and were ready for ADVENTURE!!!!!! The campers took a 2 day canoe trip down the Flat River and then 3 days camping at PJ Hoffmaster State Park in Muskegon. They came home happy, tired, and confident in themselves.

Quest for Success week is sponsored by the Michigan Commission for the Blind. It served 11 youngsters from all over the state. We started the week with a concert by Michael Cooney, a folk musician from Maine, and had campfires, swimming, cookouts, and skill building classes. The staff from the Michigan training center in Kalamazoo taught daily living skills such as cleaning house or cooking and social skills. In the evenings the Camp T staff organized a camper talent show, a dance and the kids made their own pizzas and cooked them in our outdoor wood fired oven.

Art Camp was great fun again this year. Dr. Paul Ponchillia from Western Michigan University taught soapstone sculpture with the help of Scott Ford and

Moad Yousef. Steve Handschu, a sculptor from Chicago, helped the campers put the finishing touches on the wood fired oven by turning it from a plain old adobe oven into a DRAGON (named Smorge) with smoke coming out of its' mouth and nose. We hiked a mile on a field trip to inspect folk art metal sculptures made by a local artist. With the guidance of artist Michael Donnenfeld the kids made masks of their own faces, and we still had time for singing around the campfire and making s'mores. It was REALLY hot that week, but we drank lots of water and had LOTS of fun swimming.

Prom night was great fun. The campers decorated the dining hall and JJ Meddaugh was our Dynamic DJ. We had a manicurist and hair stylist to get kids ready and a limousine to chauffeur them from the dorms to the prom. We had a fancy dinner with a real chef to help our cook prepare and serve the meal. We stayed up late that night. We were having too much fun to go to bed early.

Music week at Camp T was really busy. We had 26 campers and started the week with a concert by Carol Johnson, an artist associated with the Michigan Council for the Humanities, who has many CD's and lots of experience with kids programs. We sang along with her music Sunday night, and then Monday morning she came back to camp and helped us write a new Camp T song. "Camp Tuhsmeheeta, no finer place, no finer people....." Carol helped campers all week with their original songs and was there to play back-up guitar for our concert at the end of the week. On Monday morning the "J" Folks from Ada brought their whole family and taught us to make a Canjo. (An instrument with a dulcimer fingerboard and a can for a sound chamber.), and Carol led a song writing workshop. Tim Paulding led a percussion workshop Monday night.

Tuesday Matt Watroba, a folk musician, and host of the radio show "Folks like Us" (on WEMU) gave a workshop in the afternoon and a concert at night. Wednesday we got a visit from JJ Jackson who is a Governor appointed member of the board of the Michigan Commission for the Blind. He is a musician and gave a saxophone workshop and the next day a talk on his trip to Zimbabwe. Bea and Burt Furman gave a concert Wednesday night.

WE were fortunate to have John Kuska on trumpet and Tim Paulding on drums and piano and Carol Johnson on guitar all week as we practiced. Thursday we practiced and recorded all day and that night held a concert with all the campers and staff performing for parents. We had JJ Meddaugh recording the concert and playing piano on many of the songs as well as John Kusko on trumpet, Tim Paulding on piano and drums, and Carol Johnson on guitar. JJ then edited the recordings and put together a CD of our efforts. When you hear it, you'll know how much FUN we had that night.

What a FUN summer. MANY THANKS to everyone who made it possible.

SPECIAL THANKS to Lydia Schuck who did a great job in the Crafts area, (she is a fountain of knowledge and great ideas). The kids made and took home lots of neat projects.

Archives:

Dance like nobody's watching

By Lauren Befus - Personally Speaking

For the very first time in my life, I had the privilege on Saturday night to experience firsthand the lofty challenge that Mark Twain issued to a generation come to fruition.

For the first time, I saw children dance like nobody was watching, love like they've never been hurt, sing like nobody was listening and live like it was heaven on Earth.

I have been to many proms, but I've never before been to a blind prom. When I think back to my school dances, I'm reminded of how my friends and I would circle up with each other, no one new getting in or around our tight-knit group. I remember the popular students on the dance floor and the outcasts sitting along the walls and at tables. I remember the judgment, the laughing and the mocking of my peers who may not have had the nicest dresses, the fanciest shoes, the best hair or the cutest date.

Image was everything -- you were in or you were out.

That wasn't my experience at Camp Tuhsmeheeta's first summer prom Saturday. In fact, the dance at the Oakfield Township camp for blind and visually impaired youngsters wasn't about critiquing popularity, fashion or good looks. It was so much richer, so much deeper than that.

Young men and women of all statures and races -- short, tall, big, small, Asian, black, Hispanic and Caucasian -- danced, held hands, laughed, sang and shouted like nobody was watching. Instead of using their canes to get around, the campers threw them to the side and danced and walked around in freedom. They were free to bump into one another, make up their own dance moves, lose each other on the dance floor and (after a few loud shouts) reunite. They were free to be who they were without fear of criticism.

I watched the children with wild abandon perform line dances on their own and sing at the top of their lungs when their favorite songs blared through the speakers. As I helped a cute, young, blond-haired blind boy find a partner during a slow song, I realized that any of the superficial judgments I make about people that determine whether I will talk to them didn't matter to this child.

What was on the outside wasn't as important as what was on the inside. If they had had sight, couples and friends at the dance likely never would have met, let alone befriended one another. Yet they cared about each other with a pure love like I've never encountered before.

Rather than having pity on these children for having to endure life without sight, I stood in the middle of the room and was overcome with feelings of excitement for their lives and everything they will be, thanks to this hidden treasure -- "Camp T."

The longer I watched and observed the campers interact, the more my feelings of excitement were overshadowed by what I can honestly say was envy.

How would my life be different if I was blind? How would I treat people if I couldn't see what they looked like? Would I be nicer? Would I be more compassionate? Would I love more? Would I care about people for what they are like on the inside, rather than on the outside?

While I hope the answers are yes, yes, yes and yes, shouldn't the even greater question revolve around how this event can impact my life and all our lives today, whether we can see or not?

I want what these children have -- freedom from judging outward appearances, freedom to be who they are and freedom to dance like no one is watching.

Lauren Befus is a staff writer for The Daily News. She can be reached at lbefus@staffordgroup.com or (616) 754-9303 ext. 3039.

OUB's Learning through FUN Philosophy

It must be FUN

Design all activities so the maximum impact of teaching skills of blindness can be applied.

Carefully engineer activities, so that a skill learned, is repeated several times during the course of the day.

Publish written materials (schedules, menus, and project instructions) in Braille, LARGE TYPE, and electronic format.

Insist campers travel independently, which will improve their mobility skills, and promote self confidence.

Use every encounter with campers to help them improve their daily living and personal management skills.

Our staff will resist the temptation of doing "for" and will teach and encourage "you can do it for yourself". Independence is the goal.

Create an environment which uses blind role models as teachers and examples of "I CAN do it."

Instill a philosophy that "I am blind, but with the proper training and skills, I can be happy, productive, competent, and contribute in the community where I live".

Help our campers concentrate on their personal goals and aspirations, empowering them with confidence and developing skill sets that best enable them to meet their life's dreams.

Did I mention that we will do this while having LOTS of Fun???

Being blind as a child, especially one born blind, is very different from having any other disability, because a child develops a "vision" of how the world is that is not anywhere near the same as the world as a sighted person sees it. His or her concrete perception of the real world ends at the ends of his fingers and toes, and everything else that exists or happens, or any sequence of events, has to be taken on faith.

The sheer number of skills a blind person must learn differently from her sighted peers in order to live independently is staggering. Add in the skills necessary for *any* person to fit into a sighted world (learning to eat and dress properly, keep their things organized when they can't see them and even walk with good posture), and the list becomes nearly impossible.

The only people who really know how to master the majority of these skills are other, competent, blind people.

Very nearly 100% of our teachers of the visually impaired are sighted. Most of our children go to schools surrounded 100% of the time by sighted people. Most of our children live in homes where their family members are all sighted. Even in the very best school, with the best teacher and the best family, a child who is blind will have a hard time learning all he needs to know and all the skills required to be successful in a sighted world.

That's why we support Camp Tuhsmeheeta, and why we continue to press for activities where families with children who are blind and visually impaired can meet other blind children and adults who have been there and done that. Isolation from other blind people is our number one enemy.

From the desk of *Sharon Burton*

I had the responsibility of coordinating the music camp music programs this year at Camp T.

We had Carol Johnson, Matt Watroba, Bea Furman, JJ Jackson, and the J Folks give workshops.

I donated my services, and spent the week at camp.

What a JOY.

The music was great, and at the end of the week we recorded a concert which will be issued as a CD to the campers.

Carol Johnson helped the campers write a song about Camp Tuhsmeheeta. "Camp Tuhsmeheeta, no finer place, no finer people..... I am strong, I am independent,...I am ME...." That is the essence of Camp T the kids want people to realize they ARE strong, independent and themselves. Individuals who just happen to be blind.

One experience I had was sitting next to an 11 year old young man from Troy Michigan.. He wanted a glass of punch. I said I'd get the first one, he had to get more if he wanted them. He told me he didn't know how to pour a glass of punch. I said I'd show him. He was thirsty, and we tried it 5 times. He put his finger over the edge of the glass so that when the liquid hit his finger he would stop pouring. On the 5th glass he did it. He Said "DID I DO THAT???"

"Yes", I said. And he kept saying I DID IT!!! I DID IT!!!!

Every time I saw him at meal time and he poured his own drink he said "I DID IT!"

That's what Camp T is all about. Helping kids learn that they can be independent. All the other campers at camp are blind or visually impaired and campers can understand that every one of them has strengths and weaknesses and that it is possible to do things for yourself. Sometimes you just need someone to show you how.

The staff and mentors at Camp T were talented individuals who guided campers and were good examples to follow. A non-judgmental environment and a little guidance go a long way.

Camp Tuhsmeheeta

Wish List

- Braille click rulers (wood shop and other projects) 15 at \$60.00 each.
- Talking tape measures 6 at \$90.00 each.
- Braille compasses (to aid in trail hikes and basic navigation) \$72.00 each
- Sound System for Music/Singing \$1,200.00
- Adaptive kitchen equipment for campers to use during Culinary Camp and take home. \$500.00
- Two 2 person sailboats \$975.00 each
- Funds to hire 6 innovative specialty instructors. \$12,000.00
- Small guest cabins to house families or visiting teachers. Materials \$3,000.00 each, (We need four.)
- Wood for woodshop projects \$1,000.00
- Small tools for woodshop \$675.00.
- The CD's for music camp cost \$475.00
- Tee shirts for campers \$600.00.
- Tee shirts for staff \$625.00.
- Recording equipment for friendship project \$450.00.
- CD's for friendship project. \$250.00
- One year of satellite internet connection. \$600.00.
- Matching funds for music program grants \$3,500.00
- Garden plants and seeds \$200.00
- Art and craft supplies \$700.00.
- Drums, harmonicas, dulcimers, recorders, \$2,200.00
- Printing costs of brochures \$1,500.00
- Transportation for campers \$950.00

Our camp provides a high staff to camper ratio. We need funding to subsidize each camper during the summer camp sessions. Our camp fee is \$200.00 and our costs in 2005 ran about \$1,000.00 per camper per week.